

State Representative Linda Lawson

Helping Hoosier Families

113th Indiana General Assembly, Spring 2004

Session Report



Property
Tax Relief



Protecting
Children



Job
Creation





113th General Assembly Ends

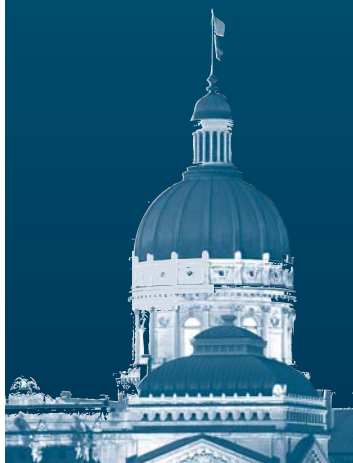
Dear Friends,

The 2004 short session of the Indiana General Assembly has ended. I have detailed several important pieces of legislation in this newsletter, including property tax relief, children's safety issues and increased access to affordable prescription drugs.

I hope you find this information useful, and I will keep you updated over the next few months on other legislation that should have a positive impact on you and your family. Please contact me if you have any questions or concerns about state government.

Sincerely,

Linda Johnson



Property Tax Relief

When the Indiana General Assembly restructured our state's tax code in 2002, one goal from that effort was to give homeowners relief from the court-ordered reassessment. As the first series of assessments was completed, it became apparent that homeowners were facing an increasingly larger share of the burden passed to them by Indiana's courts.

Because of their concerns, House members led an effort to begin the 2004 session ahead of time. Starting in November, legislators began discussions on additional reforms that resulted in passage of Senate Enrolled Act 1, which contains nearly **\$500 million in protection for homeowners, businesses and farms from property tax increases**. It provides additional protections from both the court-ordered reassessment and unchecked local property tax increases.

When lawmakers returned in



January, our efforts resumed to give tax relief to the people who needed it the most. We were able to pass another measure (Senate Enrolled Act 296) that **increases property tax deductions for seniors on lower incomes, veterans, the blind and disabled**, as well as those who are rehabilitating homes.

House Enrolled Act 1005 takes additional steps to find other means of financing government services. One study committee will explore alternatives to the property tax, while another will examine the efficiency of local government operations. This measure also sets up the groundwork for keeping property taxpayers better informed. A pilot program getting under way in 2005 will provide taxpayers in certain counties with detailed breakdowns on their **tax statements that will show where their tax dollars are being used**.

Additionally, people who are financing or refinancing a home will be given information on the types of tax deductions available.

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Additional Bills Passed

There were several other significant pieces of legislation passed by the General Assembly.

House Bill 1029 will allow a custodial parent to bring a court action to **recover delinquent child support payments** by intercepting the state income tax return of the parent responsible for the obligation.

House Bill 1229, called The Indiana Homeowner Protection Act, places **tougher restrictions on the practice called predatory lending**. Homeowners will be protected from overpriced loans with unreasonable terms that often are impossible to pay back, placing people at risk of losing their homes through foreclosure.

House Bill 1449 will help **restore the constitutionality of Indiana's curfew law** by including provisions that protect minors who are exercising First Amendment rights.

House Bill 1178 will allow courts to create a program **permitting volunteers to become advocates for seniors**. Probate courts will be allowed to appoint trained and supervised volunteers to serve as guardians for a limited time to incapacitated or protected elderly who are at-risk inpatients in health care facilities in Indiana.

Helping Hoosier Families



Representative Lawson attends the bill signing for House Enrolled Act 1200 with Governor Kernan (above) and distributes booster seats on the House floor with Representative Peggy Welch (below).



Lawson Addresses Child Safety Issues

During the 2004 session, several bills were passed which will increase protections for children. Among those initiatives was a bill that I authored regarding domestic violence fatality review teams, as well as several other measures which will protect children from abuse and keep them safe in automobiles.

- I authored **House Enrolled Act 1200** which will change the scope of cases that may be reviewed by domestic violence fatality review teams and allow coroners and deputy coroners to serve as members of them. These teams review law enforcement policies and procedures and evaluate services that are available to domestic violence victims in an attempt to prevent future domestic violence fatalities.

- House Enrolled Act 1194** will help protect children from abuse or neglect by requiring criminal history checks for anyone who resides in a home in which a child is to be placed for protective custody. Child Protective Services will also be able to monitor cases where abuse is "indicated," rather than just those cases which are "substantiated".

Increased public disclosure will also be required in cases where a child dies as a result of abuse or neglect. A child fatality review team will be created under this bill to investigate sudden and/or unexpected deaths of children.

- House Enrolled Act 1245** will make neglect of a dependent a Class A felony if the neglect results in the death of that child. Penalties will also be increased for contributing to the delinquency of a minor if an adult provides alcohol or a controlled substance to a minor and that act is determined to have caused the death of any person.

- House Enrolled Act 1098** will require anyone who operates a motor vehicle with a passenger who is less than 8 years of age to place the child in a booster seat. Passengers between 8 and 16 years old will be required to wear a seat belt, no matter where in the car the child is seated.

The bill will also create a Child Restraints System Account which will provide grants to private and public organizations to purchase and distribute child restraint systems such as booster seats at minimal or no charge.



Medication Savings

Hoosiers Gain Access to Affordable Prescription Drugs

Legislators also worked hard to protect Hoosiers from the rising costs of prescription drugs. Under a plan approved this session, more than **400,000 Hoosiers would gain access to affordable prescription drugs**, with many more qualifying in years to come.

House Bill 1265 enables the state to set up an aggregate prescription drug purchasing program to negotiate the prices of prescription drugs from phar-

maceutical companies. **Indiana will also be able to enter into joint purchasing agreements with other states, gaining added bargaining power.**

People who sign up for the program will get a prescription drug card to receive the savings when they fill their prescriptions at their local drugstores. This program will simplify the lives of many and improve the conditions for people on fixed and limited incomes.

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Representative Linda Lawson reviews legislation on the floor of the House chamber.

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Creating Hoosier Jobs

Protecting and creating Hoosier jobs and businesses were among the issues of most concern in the 2004 General Assembly. Three bills and a resolution were passed that will aid in the retention and creation of jobs as well as encourage business development and corporate responsibility.

One measure that I co-authored was House Resolution 47 which calls on the president and Congress to address a growing trade imbalance that has resulted in the loss of more than 2 million manufacturing jobs in the U.S. since 2001. It asks that **trade agreements require that corporations pay fair and competitive wages**, respect the rights of workers to unionize, and adopt workplace safety and anti-pollution standards equal to those in our country. The resolution also encourages the federal government to **provide economic incentives to sectors that have seen record job losses** due to NAFTA, and address the adverse effects on trade caused by countries that artificially lower the value of their currency relative to the dollar.

House Bill 1080 will help **stimulate Indiana's economy** by providing a price preference to Indiana businesses for public works and procurement contracts. This piece of legislation will focus on Indiana companies first as suppliers for goods and services the state is interested in purchasing.

House Bill 1434 **will benefit low-income businesses by fostering economic development opportunities** by providing grants for training and technical assistance. The microenterprise partnership program created under the bill will provide assistance to businesses with fewer than five employees.

House Bill 1365 will make the state's research and development tax credit permanent, extend the life of the Hoosier Business Investment Tax Credit and create a new fund to encourage investment in new technology. It also calls for a study of **eliminating corporate tax loopholes in current Indiana law** that currently cause tax increases on Hoosier homeowners and businesses.

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